

REFUGEE

Arizona Refugee Resettlement Journal

resettlement

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A VISIT TO GHANA, WEST AFRICA

INSIGHTS ON REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

By Donna Buckles

Recently, I was honored to be chosen by Church World Service to be part of the team to visit Ghana and learn of the refugee work there. It was an unforgettable experience and I welcome the opportunity to share it with you.

Accra, Ghana, on the coast of West Africa, is a busy city filled with vendors. Everyone seems to be selling something. People carry baskets of fruit, homemade bread, candy bars, trinkets and treasures on their heads. When cars are stopped for a red light, the vendors come walking up to try and sell something. All along the streets are small stands displaying their wares. Some vendors sell woven baskets, others sell furniture and others car parts. Everyone speaks English.

At the edge of this busy city sits the Buduburam Refugee Camp, which has 38,000 refugees living in it. The government of Ghana donated the land to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1990 for them to open the camp, and mostly Liberians live there. They have begun micro-enterprises in the camp, to earn money

for food and clothing, and to pay for their children's school. People from the community are allowed in the camp to purchase items.

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At the refugee transit center in Accra, Donna Buckles visits with a family from Togo who is preparing to be resettled in the U.S.

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SAVE THE DATE FOR THE ANNUAL RRP CONFERENCE

March 26-27, 2007 • Black Canyon Conference Center, Phoenix

The Refugee Resettlement Program Annual Conference is a two-day event designed for refugees, service providers and community members. Vincent Kituku, Ph.D., CSP is the featured keynote speaker this year.

The conference theme is *Refugees in Arizona: Along the Path of Freedom Lie the Seeds of Hope*. Those who attend will discover many helpful and informative workshops. Additionally, attendees may enjoy a Monday night networking reception which is new to the conference in 2007.

If you are interested in attending, or would like more information, call (480) 893-6110, or email refugeeresettlement@kc-a.com. ■



FROM THE STATE REFUGEE COORDINATOR

Dear Friends,

As we begin 2007, I want to thank you for supporting refugees and your dedication to the refugee program. It continues to be my pleasure to work with you in this important humanitarian effort. As we face challenges and continue to seek solutions that advance refugee rescue and resettlement in Arizona and our nation, I want to share some inspiring words spoken by Colin Powell in 2005, shortly after serving as Secretary of State – and with these words wish you a very Happy New Year!

Warmly,



Charles Shipman
State Refugee Coordinator
Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program

"As I traveled the world as secretary of state, I encountered anti-American sentiment. But I also encountered an underlying respect and affection for America. People still want to come here. Refugees who have no home at all know that America is their land of dreams. Even with added scrutiny, people line up at our embassies to apply to come here.

You see, I believe that the America of 2005 is the same America that brought Maud Ariel McKoy and Luther Powell to these shores, and so many millions of others. An America that each day gives new immigrants the same gift that my parents received. An America that lives by a Constitution that inspires freedom and democracy around the world. An America with a big, open, charitable heart that reaches out to people in need around the world. An America that sometimes seems confused and is always noisy. That noise has a name, it's called democracy and we use it to work through our confusion.

An America that is still the beacon of light to the darkest corner of the world."



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ARIZONA GROUP FUNDS SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDENTS HIT BY KATRINA

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Government ordered the evacuation of Japanese Americans from their West Coast homes to internment camps in various inland states. Among those evacuated were students who were forced to withdraw from high school and college and move to the camps. The majority of them were Nisei, second generation American-born descendants of Japanese immigrants.

To help these students continue their education, several religious groups and educators joined forces to launch the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASRC), which provided financial support for these students, allowing them to leave the camps and continue their education during the difficult war years.

In 1980, nearly forty years after the wartime incarceration of the West Coast Japanese, a small group of New England Nisei established the Nisei Student Relocation Commemorative Fund (NSRCF) to pay tribute to the NJASRC. The founders of the NSRCF resolved to commemorate the evacuation, as well as the generosity of those people who had reached across race differences and wartime hatred so many years earlier to offer a helping hand.

Interest from the NSRCF endowment is awarded in the form of scholarships to high school students from various Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, to help cover expenses during their first year of education at a two-year or four-year accredited program, including universities, community colleges or vocational schools. Scholarships range from \$500 to \$2000. Eligible students may be American-born of Southeast Asian ancestry, immigrants from Southeast Asia, or children of Southeast Asian refugees.

Since 1983, the NSRCF has awarded more than \$416,000 to 473 deserving students. Its endowment now exceeds \$900,000. Each year, the board of directors of the Connecticut-based organization selects one state to administer the program for qualified students in that state, and Arizona was chosen for 2006.

However, reflecting the spirit of those who had founded the original Student Relocation Fund, the Arizona NSRCF Committee, with the approval of the national organization, decided that the 2006 scholarships would be awarded to Southeast Asian students in those areas of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi which had been hardest hit by last year's Hurricane Katrina, rather than to Arizona students.

According to Karen Leong, Arizona NSRCF Committee Chair and Director of Asian Pacific American Studies at Arizona State University,

scholarships were awarded to 16 students in that region within six months after Katrina. "I'm also pleased to report," she said, "that Arizona has been chosen to administer the program again in 2008, at which time we hope to award up to \$40,000 in scholarships to Arizona students."

Additional information about the program is available at www.nsrcsfund.org. ■



Recipients of Nisei Student Relocation Commemorative Fund (NSRCF) 2006 scholarships. Reception held in New Orleans at Loyola University on August 19, 2006. 11 of the 16 winners were present. Seated with student winners are Yutaka Kobayashi representing NSRCF and Lisa Loo, Associate General Counsel, representing ASU.

FFY 2007 PROJECTED ARRIVALS IN ARIZONA

World Region	Phoenix		Tucson	
	Family	Free	Family	Free
Africa	271	396	51	310
East Asia	62	391	2	24
Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Union	26	152	18	80
Western Hemisphere	74	162	21	89
Near East/South Asia	59	147	21	104
TOTAL	492	1,248	113	607

REFUGEE CAMP

continued from page 1

Once they're approved for resettlement and receive notice that they're scheduled to leave, the refugees attend a three-day class to get them ready for life in America.

The camp has electricity but no running water, so drinking water has to be brought in. Many of the buildings were in existence when the government donated the land so the houses are permanent structures made of block or cement.

I was impressed with all the education going on at the camp for both children and adults. There are 49 schools and many, many skill classes for adults. Also, the presence of 45 churches and other community organizations provide a better quality of life for the refugees.

The joint efforts of the UNHCR, the Christian Council of Ghana and other community organizations make this camp the best camp in Africa. Here, refugees register and wait for their interviews to see if they'll be approved for resettlement in the United States.

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The refugee interview process is very thorough. The staff of the Overseas Processing Entity, run by Church World Service, treat the refugees with kindness and respect. But it's a long, difficult process for the refugees. They have many hours of waiting and then are asked the same questions by three different interviewers.

It requires a lot of patience on everyone's part to document all the facts and to have the documentation ready for the immigration officers.

Once they're approved for resettlement and notified that they're scheduled to leave, the refugees attend a three-day class to prepare them for life in America.

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CWS-OPE cultural orientation staff teach for three days to explain about life in America. They use posters as seen on the wall.



Women attend classes at the Women's Center to learn to braid hair.



Many refugees at Buduburam Camp have set up micro-enterprises to earn money.



These children were having recess at the Buduburam Refugee Camp.



Buduburam Refugee Camp in Accra, Ghana has several schools on the grounds. This is a group of high school students studying math.

LSMS LAUNCHES LANGUAGE PROGRAM

The Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program has entered into a new contract with Lutheran Social Ministry of the Southwest (LSMS), under the terms of which LSMS is providing English Language Training (ELT) classes for adult refugees. According to Craig Thoreson, Resettlement Director at LSMS, the classes are designed to provide refugees with basic English language skills.

"Our number one priority," Thoreson said, "is to provide new arrivals with the basic tools they need to survive in their new surroundings. That means the ability to learn enough of the language to enable them to shop for food and other necessities, to apply for employment, to make use of the public transportation system, and to effectively communicate in emergency situations and in those involving their personal safety."

While the primary focus may be on new arrivals, Thoreson is quick to point out that it's not at the expense of those refugees who arrived here earlier. "Our goal," he says, "is to equip all refugees with the language skills they need in order to communicate effectively."

Refugees continue to arrive in Arizona from around the world. Recently, Thoreson reports, Burmese refugees are among the largest groups arriving, while a steady stream of others keep coming from Russian speaking areas as well as from Africa and the Middle East.

The new series of classes are under the direction of Irene Wharry, LSMS's ELT Coordinator, who reports that four new classes have recently been launched in various Maricopa County locations. All classes are conducted entirely in English in order to allow the refugees to become conversant in their new language as quickly as possible. Classes are limited to no more

than 15 students each, with the ideal number being 8 to 10.

Each new student is tested and then placed in a class at one of four levels geared to his or her knowledge of English. "Ideally," Wharry reports, "we seek to hold the classes in apartment complexes and other areas where our students work and live, or which they can easily reach by bus. We want them to be able to function and to communicate effectively in their new land."

While just four classes are currently being held, Thoreson reports that plans are underway to increase that number significantly. "We're anticipating a large increase in the number of refugees arriving in January," he says, "and we're looking to add 20 to 25 new classes in various Maricopa County locations."

"It's my responsibility," says Wharry, "to find appropriate locations and provide the necessary documentation to allow us to conduct the classes which will allow arriving refugees to function in their new surroundings as quickly as possible." ■



Eager refugees gather to learn basic English language skills that will help them as they apply for employment, use public transportation, shop for food and other necessities and communicate effectively in emergency situations.

LIFE IN A GHANA REFUGEE CAMP

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The content and quality of this Cultural Orientation class far exceeded my expectations. The subjects covered were very inclusive and the topic posters on the walls were bright and helpful. The teacher was enthusiastic and engaged the refugee students who seemed very excited to learn about America. At the end of three days they received their certificate of completion and were ready to go.

After visiting with staff at the Overseas Processing Entity, UNHCR, the U.S. Embassy Refugee Coordinator and the International Office of Migration, I now have a better understanding of the entire process of refugee resettlement and how many

people are involved. I'm glad there are organizations like these who assist refugees. The staff we met are devoted and caring, and have a heart for helping refugees.

Many thanks to the following churches which provided scholarship money to cover my cost of this educational trip: First Baptist Church of Scottsdale; Church of the Master Presbyterian; Historic First Presbyterian Church; Scottsdale Presbyterian Church; Lakeview United Methodist Church; Shepherd of the Hills Congregational Church; and the following Lutheran churches: All Saints, Desert Cross, Gloria Dei, and Love of Christ. ■



SPOTLIGHT ON AMERICAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

CROSSING CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES TO HELP THE NEEDY

The American Muslim Women's Association (AMWA), launched in 1997, is a nonprofit, private, charitable organization which is committed to improving the economic status of needy women and families who reside in the greater Phoenix area. The stated objectives of the approximately 100-member organization are as follows:

- to promote a positive image of Islam;
- to help women from all ethnic and religious backgrounds attain self-sufficiency;
- to provide emergency financial assistance to women;
- to offer scholarships to women returning to school; and
- to assist in the resettlement of refugee families.

OUTREACH TO REFUGEES

Under its Refugee Outreach Program, AMWA assists needy families by providing rent for apartments, utility bills, interest free loans and grants for transportation. Items such as clothes, furniture and kitchen utensils are donated to newly arrived refugee families, with special attention given to expectant mothers.

According to Sadaf Khwaja, recently elected AMWA president, the organization seeks to work with as many refugee organizations as possible, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the

Muslim American Society (MAS). Last year, for example, AMWA and MAS representatives, along with numerous volunteers, including children, gathered to fill tote bags with personal hygiene items for Hurricane Katrina evacuees from New Orleans.

Each of the more than 100 tote bags had a card attached, with the inscription "May Peace and Blessings be upon you," and the names of the donating organizations. The children made pretty cards to insert in the tote bags, with encouraging wishes for the refugees who would receive them. As soon as the project was completed, the bags were released to the Red Cross for distribution.

On an ongoing basis, AMWA also collects Qurans in Arabic and prayer rugs which it donates to refugee families. It also conducts annual back-to-school drives for both elementary and high school children of refugee families.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY PROGRAM

A major focus for AMWA is the Adopt-a-Family program, especially during the month of Ramadan. Every year, AMWA networks with various organizations and comes up with a list of families in dire need of help. These families receive food and AMWA enlists people to adopt them in order to provide them with health and hygiene products, clothes, shoes and gifts. Various associations send in names of families that need help with everything, including food, and many families from the community contact AMWA about participating in this worthy project.

EMERGENCY FUNDING

AMWA also helps with providing financial assistance to women in dire situations. Recently, they've included: a woman recuperating from multiple brain surgeries; a victim of domestic violence in need of food and shelter; a recently widowed woman in desperate need of funds to meet her medical needs; a new arrival who came to Arizona seeking medical treatment for her husband; and a mother of six in need of childcare and transportation.

OTHER PROGRAMS

In addition to its work with refugees, and with women and families in need, AMWA offers several other services, including interest-free loans to help women get back on their feet and to enable them to join the workforce and become self-sufficient. The organization also offers scholarships of \$1,000 per year for tuition to deserving female students.

Scholarship application forms, along with other information about the activities of the American Muslim Women's Association, are available on its website: www.amwaaz.org. ■



AMWA serving Iftaar during the month of Ramadan at the ARCC (Arizona Refugee Community Center).



RECEIVES NUMEROUS AWARDS

TEMPE HISTORICAL MUSEUM EXTENDS POPULAR SOUTHEAST ASIA EXHIBIT

Since its opening in October 2005, "A Proud Journey Home: Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese Communities in America" has attracted large numbers of visitors to the Tempe Historical Museum. This community history exhibit is a joint community venture by the museum and the Program for Southeast Asian Studies (PSEAS) at Arizona State University (ASU) to assist Southeast



Mayor Hugh Hallman lights a candle with Venerable Kheng Kemsrean from the Cambodian Buddhist Temple during a blessing ceremony held in the lobby of the museum for the opening of A Proud Journey Home. Robert Thipdavong, lay leader for the ceremony, looks on.



Members of the Southeast Asian Advisory Committee who assisted the Museum in producing the exhibit, A Proud Journey Home, receive their diversity award. (L to R): Councilmember Mark Mitchell, Mayor Hugh Hallman, Tony Thipdavong, Nguyen Mong-Tuyen, Jacqueline Butler-Diaz, Councilmember Ben Arredondo, Sone Sithonmarath, Councilmember Barbara Carter, Karen Adams, Councilmember Hut Hutson, Sithay (Robert) Thipdavong, Councilmember Leonard Copple.

Asian communities in celebrating their past and pondering their future.

The idea for the exhibit came from Tony Thipdavong, a Tempe resident and ASU student, who approached the museum staff in 2004 about hosting an exhibit celebrating the 30th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the subsequent immigration of hundreds of thousands of Cambodian, Laotian and Vietnamese refugees. Funded in part by a "We the People" grant administered through the Arizona Humanities Council, the exhibit explores the experiences of these refugees in Tempe 30 years after the war's end.

"A Proud Journey Home" uses oral histories, photographs and objects from these communities to document the refugee experience of "becoming American," and adjusting to a new language while, at the same time, trying to pass their particular cultural traditions on to the next generation.

The exhibit has received several awards: Diversity Award, City of Tempe; Best Adaptation to Stated Theme Award, Museum Association of Arizona; and the Award of Merit, American Association of State and Local History. Originally scheduled to close in September, it has proved so popular that its run has been extended to a still undetermined date in 2007.

The Tempe Historical Museum is located at 809 E. Southern Avenue, on the southwest corner of Southern Avenue and Rural Road. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday and on Saturday, and 1 to 5 p.m. on Sunday. The museum is closed on Fridays and holidays.

Admission is free and ample free parking is available. For more information, or to schedule group tours, please call (480) 350-5100. ■



Members of the Advisory Committee for the A Proud Journey Home exhibit include (L to R) Robert Thipdavong, Jacqueline Butler-Diaz, Mrs. Thipdavong, Tony Thipdavong and Dr. Karen Adams

A PROUD JOURNEY HOME

Tempe Historical Museum

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UZBEK REFUGEES RECEIVE VITAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Because of the violence in their native land, more than 400 refugees from Uzbekistan have been resettled during the course of the past year in Australia, Europe and North America. A coherent group with very close ties to each other was broken up and endured a further sense of loss.



This Andijan refugee is being trained by a volunteer in the use of her new computer. For security reasons, the faces of participants in this project are not shown.

Recently a group of the Uzbek refugees has returned from the U.S. to Uzbekistan. Separated from their children and families, they're willing to take the risks of returning to their homes in the Andijan region.

In order to provide disparate Andijan refugees with the means and skills to communicate with each other, and with their families in Uzbekistan, the International Rescue Committee launched the Andijan Communications Project to help them cope with new realities and rebuild their lives. Funded by the Open Society Institute in New York, the project provides computers, and the training needed to use them, to these refugees, affording them high speed Internet access to real time information affecting their safety and security, and allowing them to communicate quickly and effectively with their fellow refugees and their own families in Uzbekistan.

These are economically disadvantaged people with minimal English and limited mobility. Having their own computer with Internet access will afford them, especially the women, an important degree of control and independence, and will make a big difference in their lives. ■